

Dinkin, Esther

Esther Dinkin *Nov 3-44*
Esther Dinkin, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Dinkin of Cypress avenue, Cotati, was one of the seven bay area girls mentioned in a recent dispatch as being the first American seamstress to see Leyte in the Philippine Islands. Esther joined up quite a few months ago and went aboard a Swedish ship out to sea immediately. Her parents have heard from her from many different countries already.

Customs officials have announced that when these ships return to the west coast the American girls will be ordered off as a new ruling forbids women to ship out as members of merchant ships. These ships have been under attack from Jap air raiders but they have carried the precious cargo through.

Miss Dinkin's friends will be pleased to know of the wonderful work she has been doing and it's hard work. She has been a steward. Before going into the service she attended the University of California at Berkeley.

Miss Esther Dinkin Jan 6-45

Miss Esther Dinkin, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Dinkin of Cotati, returned to the bay area Thursday after four months at sea—and six weeks on Leyte in the Philippines where her Norwegian ship was bombed repeatedly and Jap planes scored near misses.

Long before the American invasion on Leyte, Esther was one of seven American girls who hired out through Coastwise Lines, on a Norwegian freighter whose destination was "unknown."

All seven of the girls are leaving the maritime service. Esther, a graduate of the University of California, is expected to return to Petaluma over the weekend to visit with her family.

Esther Dinkin, Veteran Of Leyte, Returns To Tell Of Thrilling Experiences

Lady from Leyte—not many girls can claim that title, but Esther Dinkin of Petaluma is one of the few who can. She was one of the first American women to land at Leyte during the first days of the American invasion in October and knows from first-hand experience just what our men are going through. Early last year, when she was still a senior at the University of California, Esther heard that the Norwegian government accepted women on their ships. She wrote a companion, Margaret Truebridge, who was in New York, to come west and sign up with her. After Esther's graduation the two signed up and prepared to sail.

When the boat, an American built cargo ship, was being loaded the girls saw the types of materials and knew something big was going to happen. She said they were more nervous then because they were anxious to be on their way. They were pretty sure it would be the Philippines. When asked if she got seasick, she laughed. There wasn't time and besides there was always the deck for fresh air. The girls had a cabin to themselves. She said there was a water distilling plant aboard and there were always showers.

Esther left San Francisco September 10, 1944. They stopped at Pearl Harbor and were fortunate enough to get a shore leave. She said they always traveled in convoys and there were many different ones, all large.

When asked about the clothing problem she said they wore shorts all the time. Anyone would at the equator where the temperature was 90. They had their work and dress-up shorts. The difference was that the dress-up ones were clean. The girls returned with sun tans that looked as if a Hollywood artist had been hard at work with his makeup kits. Only these won't come off with soap.

The ship entered Leyte gulf October 23 and within an hour and a half received an official greeting from the Japs—a dive bombing attack. The crew manned the guns while the rest took cover anyplace that seemed safe. All wore lifebelts. The girls rushed to the first aid room to see if they could help. There were casualties aboard.

The most tragic thing, Esther said, was the plight of the Filipino people. They were starved and without clothing. When the ships entered the bay, the families came to them in little outrigger canoes with white flags, begging for food. They offered all they had — Jap souvenirs, flags, money, etc. She brought back many of these things, each with a separate story behind it.

One American negro soldier was planning to marry a Filipino girl but she didn't have a dress. Esther gave her last dress to the girl so she could be married in "style."

The morale of the American forces was high, Esther said. It helped to keep the girls in good spirits. They were on a foreign ship and when they met the Americans it was like a home reunion. She said they talked and talked to the Americans. When asked if she met anybody from this area, she said she had talked to two boys from Sonoma county but couldn't remember their names. The word spread quite fast that there were American girls aboard the ship and the soldiers all wanted to see them.

The guerrillas were wonderful, she said. They were well organized, and knew the Americans were going to land and warned the natives to leave the shore. When they reached the land, the little huts were deserted but the natives soon returned. They were so starved they couldn't survive in the jungle.

There were two American officers aboard ship because wherever a European boat carries American goods there must be officers of the United States. There weren't any shortages of cigarettes or candy. And the most important thing of all is plasma, she said. The hospital facilities were set up under heavy fire in tents. Esther said the hospital unit she saw was up for a citation. They had set up the very first day. The doctor she met hadn't slept since the invasion four days before.

The night fighting was furious. The tracers flew through the air and really looked beautiful, she said. One night she saw cross-fire of tracers concentrated on one object. They didn't know it was a Jap plane until it exploded in midair and went crashing into the sea. The American planes did a marvelous job.

An interesting sidelight was the fact that the American troops had a newspaper. It was a mimeographed sheet, very hard to read, but it was a paper.

They saw the 17th century chapel which was being used as a hospital. They tuned in the radio whenever possible and heard Tokyo Rose. They also heard Manila. A man with an English accent spoke. Messages from prisoners of war were also broadcast but they couldn't get

the names, there were so many, she said.

The girls served as stewards. Their hours were from 6 to 10 at night. But the hours ranged quite differently. "The Japs disturbed our sleep," she said with a wide grin. The food aboard the ship was fish, fish and more fish. The girls wouldn't eat it and would wait until they were fortunate enough to get a can of spinach. The Americans gave them field rations when they came to unload the ship. They learned a few Norwegian words during the trip. Esther said they did have a few submarine alarms on the way back but they didn't care. She said they would rather be subjected to torpedoeing than bombing. "When planes come you see them and worry. When you're hit by a torpedo you don't know what hit you."

She described Christmas aboard the ship. Margaret Truebridge, formerly of Oakland, made a tree out of cardboard and painted it green. She made the trinkets from the cellophane off cigarette packages and from a crashed Jap plane. She even made the star for the top. One of the army officers made the mistletoe out of a gas protector cover and little balls of cotton. The leaves were cut from the cover. The officers made a fireplace out of paper. They painted bricks and a mantlepiece on it. A light bulb was placed behind it, simulating the fire. A white blanket was the snow. Cardboard candy sticks were hung on the tree and stockings were hung at the fireplace. Esther was the "baby" and she was very fortunate. She received a pair of wool stockings. Each person had cigarettes in their stockings when Christmas arrived.

Esther is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Dinkin of Cotati. Margaret is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John K. Truebridge of Oakland. She is a graduate of the University of California, former managing editor of the Daily Californian and before signing up to ship out she was employed by the United Press. Both girls are enjoying a well earned rest at their homes. Their plans are indefinite as the government has ruled that they cannot ship out again.